



Serving the Drycleaning Industry Since 1961

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action
Nice

Frustrated that efforts to gain voluntary compliance weren't working, EPA takes
against a New York drycleaner and hints that more are to come. It's no more Mr.
Guy.

NORTHEAST

No more Mr. Nice Guy: EPA seeks major fine against NY cleaner

Expressing increasing frustration with cleaners who resist complying with its regulations, the Environmental Protection Agency has stepped up enforcement activity in New York City.

EPA announced in November that it is seeking a \$44,000 penalty from a Brooklyn drycleaner, noting that the drycleaning industry "has for some time been known to have a high rate of non-compliance with various federal, state and local environmental regulations."

Linda Habib Spencer of EPA's Region 2 office in New York city said the agency there has been trying for several years to help the cleaners come into compliance, but with those efforts frustrated, "we're now moving forward," she said.

The Region 2 office has offered compliance assistance to drycleaners in the New York City area and New Jersey since 1996, including distributing bilingual literature about environmental compliance and offering to review each facility's operations and grant temporary amnesty from penalties to give the plant time to come into compliance.

Also, EPA said, when inspections took place and violations were found, penalties were not initially levied in hopes that the businesses would come into compliance.

Earlier this year, the New York office indicated that its "Mr. Nice Guy" approach was about to end when several cleaners were fined for "paperwork violations." Each of those fines was for less than \$1,000, but at the time EPA warned that it was conducting penalty-phase inspections of cleaners and that cleaners should prepare themselves.

Last month EPA announced that "because the drycleaning industry as a whole showed no significant increase in compliance in response to either of EPA's initial efforts, the agency has shifted its focus in dealing with the industry to inspection and formal enforcement proceedings against non-complaint companies."

The get-tough approach charges Majestic Garment Cleaners in Brooklyn with violations of federal and state hazardous waste regulations and failing to provide EPA with required information about its operations. EPA is seeking a \$44,000 penalty and has ordered Majestic to immediately improve conditions at its facility so that it meets

federal and state hazardous waste standards.

Majestic is contesting the allegations in EPA's complaint.

Specifically, EPA alleges, its inspectors saw perc-contaminated water overflowing into a floor drain leading to the New York City sewer system, a steady stream of steam and liquid from a drycleaning unit that was also flowing into a sewer floor drain, and employees disposing of perc-contaminated water from steam presses onto the ground outside the buildings.

EPA inspectors said that areas around the drycleaning machines were visibly contaminated with perc-contaminated lint and a dark liquid residue. Also, EPA said it believes perc-contaminated lint was disposed in a dumpster behind the facility.

Jean P. Fox, EPA regional administrator, called the conditions at the plant "alarming."

"We expect all drycleaning facilities to recognize the importance of our hazardous waste regulations and bear in mind that environmental regulators will be looking for their compliance," Fox said.

In addition to seeking the penalty, EPA has ordered Majestic to seal floor drains near the drycleaning machinery, repair all leaks, manage all perc-contaminated lint as hazardous waste, stop disposing of contaminated steam press water outside the building and start a program of weekly hazardous waste management inspections.

Cleaners in Region 2 who want compliance help can call the EPA's Dry Cleaning Compliance Assistance number, (212) 637-4050.

Who we are...

National Clothesline provides news and information needed by garment care professionals to be successful in a rapidly changing industry. Nearly 30,000 cleaners and their suppliers throughout the United States and around the world receive it monthly by mail -- and now each current issue along with recent issues are available conveniently and quickly on the Web.

Like many of the companies in the industry it serves, the publication is a small, family-owned enterprise, founded in 1961 by Sol and Carol Memberg. The family has retained ownership over those years and with second-generation leadership on the scene that should continue well into the 21st century. A small and dedicated staff works assiduously to bring the vast and varied industry to the mailboxes and countertops of drycleaning stores everywhere.

How to contact us...

Phone: 215-830-8467

Fax: 215-830-8490

E-mail: ncled@aol.com

Mailing Address: PO Box 340

Willow Grove, PA 19090-0340